

20th Anniversary of Proposition 99
Remarks by Secretary Kim Belshé, Health and Human Services Agency
Delivered February 18, 2009 at Napa Valley Marriott, San Diego

Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to join you for the 20th anniversary of Proposition 99 and share some of my reflections about California's Prop 99 experience.

Anniversaries are an occasion to reflect on the past. As we look 20 years back to 1988, it's interesting to consider what was "normal" before 1988.

- Before 1988, doctors smoked while working in emergency rooms and in hospitals during patient exams.
- Before 1988, people could smoke wherever they want, including at work, on airplanes, in restaurants, in schools as well as in hospitals.
- Before 1988, teachers smoked in hallways between classes and schools often had smoking areas for students.
- Before 1988, nonsmokers tolerated exposure to secondhand smoke in cars, at home, in restaurants, in bars and in the workplace.

Before 1988, California was a different place in terms of quality of life and the state's public health priorities. Before 1988, I know that I was in a different place – literally and figuratively.

Now, I'm a big believer in acknowledging elephants in living rooms. And there is an elephant in this living room: me – and it's not because I am a Republican. Rather, it's because in the fall of 1988, I worked for a public affairs firm that was a part of the effort to defeat Prop 99.

Fast forward from 1988 to 1993 – I was appointed Director of the then Department of Health Services (DHS), which had responsibility over the state's tobacco control program. By that point in my professional career, I had come to better appreciate the value and effectiveness of the tobacco tax and tobacco control activity supported by Prop 99 revenues.

I am proud of what Prop 99 has accomplished in its 20 years; and I'm proud of whatever modest contribution I have been able to make in my leadership roles, first with DHS and more recently at the Health and Human Services Agency.

Indeed, I could dedicate the bulk of my time chronicling what Prop 99 has accomplished in terms of lives saved and costs avoided over the course of the past 20 years. These are successes worthy of attention and considerable pride.

What is even more compelling about the Prop 99 story, in some respects, is how California translated a modest tax on cigarettes into over a million saved lives. California's anti-tobacco effort is exemplary both in terms of what it has accomplished in combating tobacco use and in terms of what it can teach as a model for how to address other public health challenges facing California.

Four components of our state's tobacco control effort stand out for me as essential elements of the tobacco program's success – and as best practices for other public health efforts.

First, was the campaign strategy adopted.

When the Tobacco Control Program was launched in 1989 it departed from the previous traditional public health approach of focusing on smokers and youth prevention messages. Instead, the Program implemented a strategy focusing on the community and changing social norms around tobacco use throughout California, a social norm in which tobacco becomes less desirable; less acceptable; less accessible.

The social norm change strategy didn't rule out educating individuals, but emphasized making changes in the larger physical and social environment to create lasting population changes that supported cessation and discouraged tobacco uptake by youth.

Importantly, the social norm change strategy did not focus the campaign's messages and programs directly towards youth because the Program recognized that lasting change in youth behavior regarding tobacco can only be secured by first changing the adult world in which youth grow up.

The lesson from Prop 99 is clear – to support an individual's ability to change their behavior, the strategy must focus on changing the environment within which they live.

Second, the program's framework for social norm change encompasses a comprehensive approach involving a statewide media campaign combined with locally funded community-based projects. The media and local programs employed a four-prong approach that has been clear and consistent for 20 years -

- Reduce exposure to secondhand smoke and tolerance to exposure;
- Counter pro-tobacco influences;
- Reduce the availability of tobacco; and
- Promote cessation services.

The tobacco control framework demonstrates that behavioral and policy changes are achieved not by an either/or menu of strategies from which policy makers would pick and choose; rather, such changes require a multi-faceted, integrated model that continues to demonstrate that the sum is far greater than its individual parts. It is, as others have said, "the gold standard for what can be achieved through a sustained and comprehensive smoking control program."

Third is the media campaign – a program element that has been consistently provocative, attention-getting, impactful and, at times, controversial. California’s award-winning media efforts have been instrumental in creating an environment that helps local programs generate support for policies that protect non-smokers from secondhand smoke, counters pro-tobacco influences, and supports smokers seeking assistance to quit.

The lessons from the media campaign are critical for any effort to promote environmental change and improved health outcomes. First, the tobacco media effort has been comfortable with making people uncomfortable – and has had a greater impact, as a result. As an example, one of the state’s most powerful ads was an ad that made people extremely uncomfortable – Debbi, an ad that depicted a woman so addicted to nicotine that she smoke through her voicebox. It was a hard ad to watch – particularly for many smokers, including some of my own former colleagues at the Department of Health Services, but it got people talking and it influenced how people thought about and understood the power of addiction.

Second, California’s media effort embraced industry accountability as a fundamental tenet. Grounded in research, this campaign focus on countering pro-tobacco forces helped to:

- Cause people to question industry motives;
- Motivate quitting among youth and adults in response to the industry’s manipulative tactics; and
- Hold the tobacco industry accountable for their marketing practices.

Third, the media campaign demonstrated the importance of being consistently innovative and entrepreneurial in order to stretch Prop 99 dollars and broaden the reach of powerful messaging. The Be A Reel Hero contest tapped the creativity of dozens of Californians who produce fantastic anti-tobacco ads, with the winning ad running on the incredibly popular and widely seen show, American Idol.

More recently, the state partnered with the major motion picture studios to place the state’s anti-smoking television advertisements on millions of movies released in DVD format that include tobacco use that are rated G, PG, and PG-13 – extending the reach of our campaign to millions of people within California and beyond.

I’m proud to report that since we announced the agreement last year, the state’s anti-tobacco ads have been placed in the opening minutes of 32 major motion picture DVDs. Anyone who rents or watches a DVD of movies like “Dark Knight,” “The Incredible Hulk,” “Get Smart” or “Sex in the City,” to name a few, sees one of the state’s anti-smoking ad before the film begins.

Finally, the program is based on a local programs strategy – one that recognizes that Sacramento doesn’t have all the answers. The program’s theory of change was spot on – (1) local assistance grants help create (2) a local infrastructure for education and prevention efforts that, in turn, promote (3) community environments that denormalize

tobacco use – and, as communities mobilize to (4) effect local policy change, such community-based change helps inform, guide and drive (5) statewide policy change.

Probably the most prominent example of the power of grassroots education and advocacy to change social norms and drive statewide policy change is the ban on smoking in the workplace – the myriad local smoke-free laws enacted in the early 1990s made possible the statewide ban, including stand-alone bars, enacted by a Republican Governor, Pete Wilson, in 1994.

Grass-roots efforts continue to build momentum for statewide policies. Early last year, for example, we tallied 26 smoke-free beaches on the California coast and 103 cities and counties with smoke-free park laws. And, as of last spring, 16 California cities and counties had adopted local ordinances, resolutions, and housing authority policies related to secondhand smoke in multi-unit housing.

The lesson from Prop 99 is clear – policy change at the local level is a powerful and strategic lever for advancing statewide policy.

I would like to close by pointing with pride to the evidence of success of anti-tobacco model – a pride that I know I share with the Directors who have led this impressive effort over the 20 years of the campaign's life – Ken Kizer, Molly Coye, Sandra Shewry and, now, Mark Horton.

- A decline in the adult smoking prevalence rate from 22.7 percent in 1988 to 13.8 percent in 2007;
- More than one million lives saved, along with an astounding \$86 billion dollars in health care costs;
- Improved health outcomes for the people of this state – with significantly faster declines in lung cancer rates in California than in other states; and, a lower incidence rate in six out of nine cancer types that are linked to tobacco use than in the rest of the U.S.;
- And, I am happy to announce today promising new data on youth smoking rates California. Smoking among high-school aged youth has declined in California from 15.4% in 2006 to 14.6% in 2008.

This is a time to celebrate a ground-breaking program that has led the way to better health by de-normalizing smoking and by demonstrating that environmental change campaigns carried out by government can be effective and can dramatically change the way the people think and act about unhealthy behaviors.

Our state's success battling tobacco use is guiding the way for other critical social marketing efforts as well – as the Governor has proposed to address obesity, which now threatens to overtake smoking as the leading cause of death among Californians.

As we work to address this growing public health crisis, we have begun using tools to champion healthy eating and exercise – to push back and counter the messages that

tempt people to consume fast food and live sedentary lifestyles in ways that pose very real risks to their lives from heart disease and diabetes.

Thank you for making California a healthier, stronger state. Thank you for demonstrating that government can work and improve the lives of its residents. Thank you for providing the model for environmental change that can lead to a healthier California – one in which healthy eating and an active lifestyle – like tobacco cessation - are the social norm, not the exception.

As you celebrate 20 years of success in tobacco control, know that you have all created something great that is larger than tobacco.

Enjoy this opportunity to reflect on the success of Proposition 99 and share with one another the best ideas for greater achievements in the years ahead.

I look forward to the day when we can gather two decades from now – perhaps even one – and mark the day when lung cancer is no longer the number one preventable cause of death in California and smoking is virtually extinct.